PHOENIX, Ariz. -- Ohio State University has joined with 11 other major public research universities in a collaborative effort to improve undergraduate education.

Establishment of the "Alliance for Undergraduate Education: A Project of Twelve Public Research Universities" was announced Monday (11/10) at a news conference in Phoenix, Ariz., during the annual meeting of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

"There have been a number of longstanding criticisms of undergraduate education, many of which have been usefully brought together in recent national reports," Bryce Jordan, president of The Pennsylvania State University, said.

"Formation of this alliance ensures that the special opportunities for undergraduate education at our major public research universities are exploited."

Impetus for the alliance came from Penn State and the University of Minnesota. Founding members, besides those two institutions, are the University of California at Berkeley, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Illinois, University of Maryland, College Park, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ohio State, the University of Texas at Austin, University of Washington, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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Among the goals of the alliance are to develop and disseminate exemplary standards and practices for undergraduate education and to collaborate on program development and research projects about undergraduate education.

Alliance universities will participate in projects depending on existing strengths and special interests. Several projects about quality of instruction in the lower division are planned. Some members will focus on selection and training of teaching assistants, others will consider reform of general education programs, and others will collaborate on retention programs.

Other topics under study by alliance members include relationships with secondary schools, programs for minority students, assessment, academic advising, and programs to involve undergraduates in research.

According to Carol A. Cartwright, dean for undergraduate programs and vice provost at Penn State, public research universities are an appropriate group to improve undergraduate education because "they have enough diversity to make collaboration stimulating and enough similarity to make it useful."

John Wallace, assistant vice president for academic affairs at the University of Minnesota, said the alliance will be made up of academic affairs officers from the member universities.

Cartwright and Wallace are co-chairs of the alliance. Offices of the alliance will be located initially at Penn State.

Contact: Myles Brand, vice president for academic affairs and provost at Ohio State, or Joan R. Leitzel, associate provost, at (614) 292-5881.

(Releases/37)
OSU hopes group therapy suggests ways to improve

By Ruth Hanley
Dispatch OSU Reporter

Ohio State University has joined with 11 other public universities to find out how to improve undergraduate education.

The Alliance for Undergraduate Education is a collaborative effort to review and improve the ways a large university teaches students, said Joan Leitzel, OSU associate provost for curriculum and instruction.

"Being a comprehensive research university means we have some resources that differentiate us from other kinds of institutions," Leitzel said. "Those resources should be brought to bear on undergraduate education."

IN NOVEMBER, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching released a report that described the American undergraduate college as a troubled institution.

It pointed to such problems as underprepared students, conflict between professional programs and the liberal arts, and undefined goals for students and faculty members.

Other studies, including one by OSU communication Professor Keith Brooks, have indicated that some campuses place too much emphasis on research and not enough on undergraduate teaching. OSU has about 41,000 undergraduate students on its main campus and 5,000 on branch campuses.

The alliance was formalized late last year; members had been meeting informally since 1985, a period that coincided with the preparation of some of the national reports, Leitzel said.

THE MOVE to examine undergraduate education is not a new concept but occurs every 15 years or so on most campuses, she said.

OSU is in the middle of a major curriculum revision. The 12 universities in the group are about evenly split among those where curriculum reviews were recently completed, are under way or are planned, Leitzel said.

The alliance will allow the schools to share their experiences and knowledge, she said. Research projects about undergraduate education also are planned.

"We hope to get good ideas that can be implemented here," Leitzel said.

Of special interest to OSU will be information about the consequences of selective admissions, she said. Most of the other alliance members already have selective-admission policies, which OSU is starting for the first time this fall, Leitzel said.

OSU ALSO wants to learn more about how to retain high-risk students who need remedial work and often do not complete college, she said.

As part of its role in the alliance, OSU will work on projects dealing with educational development for graduate teaching assistants and writing assessment in various disciplines, Leitzel said.

Other universities in the alliance are the University of Southern California at Los Angeles and at Berkeley, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania State, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.